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## UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT AND *WELTANSCHAUUNG*. REMARKS ON LUKÁCS' LATE WRITINGS ON MARXISM

**ABSTRACT:** From 1930 onwards, György Lukács considers 'uneven development' the typical relational form between economic progress and the corresponding evolution of other fields of human activity. In the early thirties Lukács focuses on the problem of elaborating an independent Marxist aesthetics, but then necessarily find himself having to deal with the general configuration of Marx's alleged philosophy. The general theory illustrated in *The Ontology of Social Being* is where this philosophy, considered as a *Weltanschauung*, is given its final framework. His reflection on the 'specificity' of the aesthetic experience, as part of the broader framework of the main fields of art, science and everyday life, is the theoretical medium Lukács used in the fifties and sixties to fine-tune the need that had arisen decades earlier to attribute Marxism with genuine philosophical universality.

**SOMMARIO:** A partire dal 1930 György Lukács considera lo 'sviluppo ineguale' la forma relazionale tipica tra sviluppo economico e la corrispettiva evoluzione degli altri ambiti dell'attività umana. Nei primi anni trenta Lukács si concentra nell'elaborazione di un'autonoma estetica marxista, trovandosi così necessariamente innanzi al problema della configurazione complessiva di una presunta filosofia di Marx. La teoria generale illustrata ne *L'Ontologia dell'essere sociale* è il luogo in cui a tale filosofia, considerata come una *Weltanschauung*, è restituita la sua definitiva configurazione. La riflessione di Lukács sulla 'specificità' dell'esperienza estetica, intesa come elemento del più ampio ambito di arte, scienza e vita quotidiana, è lo strumento teoretico da lui approntato negli anni cinquanta e sessanta al fine di perfezionare l'esigenza sorta decenni addietro di attribuire al marxismo un'autentica universalità filosofica.

**KEYWORDS:** Lukács; Marx; Uneven development; *Weltanschauung*; Misconception

### *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

Economic geography talks about ‘uneven development’ to describe economic growth as a multi-speed process at the antipodes of a dynamic *synchronously* involving several areas of the globe.<sup>2</sup> ‘Uneven development’ plays a crucial theoretical role in the late Lukács, and yet his interpretation is very different to the aforementioned, eminently theoretical terms.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Werner Hofmann dated 4 February 1966, Lukács states:

I believe that one of the most important reasons for the dead end of current social sciences is the desire to instil in each individual example a false antinomy between law and development; instead I believe that one of Marx’s greatest achievements is to have discovered uneven development. The latter has very profound ontological roots.<sup>4</sup>

Lukács makes a double statement. The first, unequivocal statement is that ‘uneven development’ is not a minor issue for Marx, but one of his most

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: *GLW* = G. Lukács, *Werke*, Neuwied-Berlin, Luchterhand, 1962-1986 (Bielefeld, Aisthesis, 2005-). *HGW* = G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, Meiner, 1968-. *MECW* = K. Marx, F. Engels, *Collected Works*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975-2005. *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> = *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der KPdSU and Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Berlin-Moscow, 1975-1990 (ed. Internationale Marx-Engels-Stiftung, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter Akademie Forschung, 1991-). *MEW* = K. Marx, F. Engels, *Werke*, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1957-1990. [Where standard English translation is not available, I use my own German-Italian translation (Italian-English translation is by E. Young). In this case only, I have retained the original German in footnotes to enable the reader to compare the translation with the original].

<sup>2</sup> N. Smith, *Uneven Development. Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Athens (Georgia)-London, The University of Georgia Press, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Althusser is the other Marxist author who used ‘overdetermined contradiction’ to enhance the problem of ‘uneven development’ in an eminently theoretical perspective: “So uneven development [*développement inégal*] (that is, these same phenomena of displacement and condensation observable in the development process of a complex whole) is not external to contradiction, but constitutes its most intimate essence” (L. Althusser, *Pour Marx*, 1965, Paris, La Découverte, 1996, p. 219-220, trans. B. Brewster, *For Marx*, London-New York, Verso, 2005, p. 213). On this point, cf. G. Elliott, *Althusser. The Detour of Theory*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2006, p. 131-132 and L. Ferretter, *Louis Althusser*, London-New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> “Ich glaube, es ist eine der wichtigsten Ursachen der Sackgasse in den heutigen Sozialwissenschaften, daß man eine falsche Antinomie von Gesetzlichkeit und Entwicklung im Einzelfall aufstellt; ich glaube dagegen, dass die Entdeckung der ungleichmässigen Entwicklung eine der größten Errungenschaften von Marx ist. Sie hat sehr tief gehende ontologische Gründe” (J. Bayer, ed., *Ist der Sozialismus noch zu retten? Briefwechsel zwischen Georg Lukács und Werner Hofmann*, Budapest, T-Twins Verlag, 1991, p. 58).

important breakthroughs.<sup>5</sup> The second more esoteric statement is that ‘uneven development’ depends on “very profound ontological roots”. What exactly does Lukács refer to here? In essence he believes that the genesis and role of the concept of law has to be reconsidered in order to overcome the relationship between law and development as antinomic poles/forms of relationships Lukács judges to be still dominant in current social sciences. However, he believes that this requires a review of the ontological problem. Lukács’ *Ontology of Social Being* (published posthumously) and its *Prolegomena* are books in which he performs an in-depth analysis of these issues.

The concept of ‘uneven development’ is a key point in Lukács’ works between the thirties and fifties. During that period he exploits the fourth part of Marx’s famous unpublished *Introduction* (1857), and in particular the concepts of ‘unequal development’ and ‘uneven development’,<sup>6</sup> chiefly to corroborate the theory of *relative autonomy* of the field of art vis-à-vis the field of economics.<sup>7</sup> It is only with the “ontology of social being” – the

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<sup>5</sup> The first theoretical meaning of the concept of ‘uneven development’ in Lukács is dated 1924-1925: “The following expositions, however, show that art is really an example, and the same unequal developments can emerge between law and production. An insoluble problem ensues only for mechanical bourgeois thought – which has to remain trapped in the fetishistic antinomy of ‘eternal iron laws’ or ‘unique individuality’” (G. Lukács, *Chvostismus und Dialektik*, 1924-1925 Posth., Budapest, Áron Verlag, 1996, p. 55-56, trans. E. Leslie, *Tailism and the Dialectic*, London, Verso, 2000, p. 108. Trans. mod.)

<sup>6</sup> “The unequal relation [unequales Verhältniß] of the development of material production and e.g. art. In general, the concept of progress is not to be taken in the usual abstract form. With regard to art, etc., this disproportion is not so important and [non to] difficult to grasp as within practical social relations themselves, e.g. in culture. Relation of the United States to Europe. However, the really difficult point to be discussed here is how the relations of production as legal relations enter into uneven development [ungleiche Entwicklung]” (K. Marx, *Einleitung zu den „Grundrissen der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie“*, 1857, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. II, vol. 1/1, p. 44, transl. E. Wangermann, *Introduction*, in *MECW*, vol. 28, p. 46).

<sup>7</sup> “For Marx the concept of the objectivity of artistic forms here too offered the basis for the analysis of the historical and social factors in the generation of artistic forms. His emphasis on the law of uneven development [ungleichmäßige Entwicklung], on the fact that ‘certain flourishing periods (of art) by no means stand in direct relation to the general social development’, shows that he saw in those periods of extraordinary creative activity (the Greeks, Shakespeare) objective culminations in the development of art and that he considered artistic value as objectively recognizable and definable” (G. Lukács, *Kunst und objektive Wahrheit*, 1934, in *GLW*, vol. 4, p. 637, trans. A. D. Kahn, *Art and Objective Truth*, in Id., *Writer & Critic and Other Essays*, A.D. Kahn, ed., London, Merlin, 1970, p. 56). The quote from Marx to which Lukács refers is Marx, *Einleitung*, p. 44, trans. cit., *Introduction*, p. 46). For further textual references of ‘uneven development [ungleichmäßige Entwicklung]’, see G. Lukács, *Friedrich Engels als Literaturhistoriker und*

*general theory of society* Lukács outlines in his voluminous posthumous works – that uneven development acquires a different, and in some ways *innovative* theoretical function.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Marx philosopher and Weltbild. The load-bearing axes of his change of direction in 1930*

Unless one is familiar with the fundamental traits of Lukács' Marxism from 1930 onwards it is impossible to understand the role of 'uneven development' in his late works. The thirties were an important watershed not only in the evolution of Lukács' personal philosophy, but also in his interpretation of Marx.<sup>9</sup>

Lukács' interpretation of Marx after 1930 rests on two important pillars. Firstly, he states that in Marx certain theses are typically – and more or less implicitly – philosophical.<sup>10</sup> Although the premises for this statement were already present in many of Lukács' contributions from the thirties onwards, he unambiguously makes this statement in *Ontology*. He believes that Marx is not only an author well-versed in socioeconomics, but

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*Literaturkritiker*, 1935, in *GLW*, vol. 10, p. 505; Id., *Franz Mehring (1846-1919)*, 1934, in *GLW*, vol. 10, p. 401; Id., *Einführung in die ästhetischen Schriften von Marx und Engels*, 1946, in *GLW*, vol. 10, p. 401, trans. A. D. Kahn, *Marx and Engels on Aesthetics*, in Id., *Art and Objective Truth*, p. 66-67; Id., *Der junge Hegel und die Probleme der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft*, 1948 (2nd edition 1954), in *GLW*, vol. 8, p. 27, trans. R. Livingstone, *The Young Hegel. Studies in the Relation between Dialectics and Economics*, London, Merlin, 1975, p. xxvi; Id., *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, 1954, in *GLW*, vol. 9, p. 517, trans. P. R. Palmer, *The Destruction of Reason*, London, Merlin, 1981, p. 597.

<sup>8</sup> It's no accident that the notion of 'uneven development' appears in the title of two small excerpts from the *Ontology of Social Being* published by Lukács in the sixties, see Id., "Die Sowjetunion ist nicht typisch. Zur Theorie der ungleichmäßigen Entwicklung bei Marx I", *Neues Forum*, 160-161, 1967, p. 344-347 and Id., "Geschichte und Literatur. Zur Theorie der ungleichmäßigen Entwicklung bei Marx II", *Neues Forum*, 162-163, 1967, p. 518-522.

<sup>9</sup> For a more in-depth presentation of the main points behind Lukács' turn in the thirties, see G. Oldrini, *György Lukács e i problemi del marxismo del Novecento*, Napoli, La Città del Sole, 2009, p. 129-169.

<sup>10</sup> "Our later and more detailed discussion will clearly demonstrate the feebleness of a contrast of this kind between the young, philosophical, Marx and the later pure economist with no specific standpoint. We shall see that Marx in no way became 'less philosophical', but on the contrary significantly deepened his philosophical conceptions in all fields" (G. Lukács, *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins I*, in *GLW*, vol. 13, p. 567, trans. D. Fernbach, *The Ontology of Social Being 2. Marx's basic ontological principles*, London, Merlin, 1978, p. 11).

also a supporter of decisive philosophical theses.<sup>11</sup> The notion that Marx is a philosopher is the first pillar on which Lukács' interpretation of Marx rests after 1930. The second pillar of his interpretation is closely linked to the first, i.e., a concept of philosophy as knowledge aimed at reflecting a "universal image of the world [*allgemeines Weltbild*]".<sup>12</sup> Marxism as the concept of a universal and self-sufficient philosophy (i.e., not in need of 'integrations' by Kant or others) is the guiding light of Lukács' research from 1930 onwards. The late Lukács considers Marxism a *container* he fills with the concept of autonomous philosophy not directly derivable from Marx.

In *Ontology* Lukács objects to certain considerations by Rudolf Carnap: his objections provide more information about the meaning of this *Weltbild* which he defines as the "homogeneous reflection of existing reality, an image of the world".<sup>13</sup> Until the late fifties Lukács uses the expression *Weltanschauung* to refer to Marxism; later this term evolves into *Weltbild*. In both cases it is nevertheless important to emphasise how he never considered these concepts as subjectivistic, i.e., as a *free choice* of the perspective with which to view reality. As a result, in Lukács the meaning of the earlier *Weltanschauung* and the later *Weltbild* is radically different to the meaning Adorno attributes to these terms in his *Philosophical Terminology*.<sup>14</sup>

In 1930, and from then onwards, Lukács always bases his idea of philosophy as the "universal image of the world" on Marx. Only if one understands this double level – *interpretative* regarding Marx and *personal* regarding Lukács – is it possible to genuinely assess his ideas during the latter part of his life. Apart from the aforementioned interpretative problem, there is another key problem: starting in the thirties, Lukács uses the term 'Historical Materialism' to present his *personal* interpretation of Marxism as *Weltbild*. However, the latter – which was to emerge clearly only in *Ontology of Social Being* – presupposes specific considerations regarding the relationship between social being and general ontology

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<sup>11</sup> Id., *Gelebtes Denken*, 1969-1971, in *GLW*, vol. 18, p. 123-124, trans. R. Livingstone, *Record of a Life*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> G. Lukács, *Zur Ontologie I*, in *GLW*, vol. 13, p. 330.

<sup>13</sup> "eine zusammengehörige Widerspiegelung der an sich seienden Wirklichkeit, ein *Weltbild*" (ibid., p. 349). To some extent, in accordance with Lukács theses on Carnap is G. Szécsi, "Knowledge, reality and manipulation. György Lukács on the social epistemological context of the neopositivist rejection of ontology", *Studies in East European Thought*, 67 (1-2), 2015, p. 31-39.

<sup>14</sup> T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie. Zur Einleitung*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 118.

(involving inorganic and organic being); these considerations cannot be *immediately* deduced from the ‘materialistic concept of history’.

## 2. Marx’s three ‘fundamental ontological statements’

In both *Ontology* and *Prolegomena* Lukács proposes a key thesis: the presence of three ‘fundamental ontological statements’ in Marx.<sup>15</sup> It is not easy to establish a direct link between the three ‘fundamental ontological statements’ and the original contexts from which Lukács intends to deduce them. Although the three statements appear in different posthumous ontological works, in this essay I shall refer to Lukács’ unitary presentation in several consecutive paragraphs of the *Prolegomena*. Marx’s first fundamental ontological statement – ‘objectivity’ – is described as follows:

The so far often introduced fundamental ontological statements [Marx’s statements, author’s note] must act as a starting point. First and foremost, that a being can be considered a being, when it is from all points of view something that is objectively determined. An indeterminate being is simply a product of the mind: an abstraction from all the determinations the totality of which is the only thing that makes a being what it is.<sup>16</sup>

The first principle enunciates the theory that a being is always something that is ‘objectively determined’, in other words each individual being is always something irreducible and individual. Lukács uses this statement to try and achieve a dual goal: on the one hand he wants to maintain an ontological perspective, on the other he intends to distance himself from any argument based on the concept of the existence of a ‘being in general’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lukács, *Prolegomena zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, in *GLW*, vol. 13, p. 126. Lukács identifies three ontological ‘levels’ (inorganic, organic and social being). These levels are genetically linked (the first is the basis of the second and the second is the basis of the third), but each maintains its own traits; the traits of the first ‘level’ are maintained in the upper levels, but not vice versa, see *ibid.*, p. 326-327. For a more in-depth discussion of the three ‘fundamental ontological statements’, see M. Gargani, *Produzione e filosofia. Sul concetto di ontologia in Lukács*, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York, Olms, 2017, p. 73-252.

<sup>16</sup> “Als Ausgangspunkt müssen seine schon bis jetzt oft angeführten grundlegenden ontologischen Feststellungen dienen. Vor allem, daß das Sein nur dann als Sein betrachtet werden kann, wenn es ein in jeder Hinsicht objektiv bestimmtes ist. Ein bestimmungsloses Sein ist bloß ein Denkprodukt: eine Abstraktion von allen Bestimmungen, deren Totalität das Sein erst zum Sein macht” (Lukács, *Prolegomena*, p. 126-127).

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 115. Lukács’ key critique here is Hegel’s ‘pure being’ described at the beginning of the first Section of his *Logic*: “Being, pure being – without further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself and also not unequal with respect to another; it has no difference within it, nor any outwardly”. (G.

In this case, and also in the other two ‘fundamental ontological statements’, Lukács ascribes this first ontological statement to Marx.<sup>18</sup>

According to Lukács, Marx’s second fundamental ontological statement is the fundamental ‘ontological statement’ of the objective nature of categories. The focus of Lukács’ argument is the concept that considers categories as subjective products created by the mind of the cognisant subject.<sup>19</sup> He states: “The next, closely linked to this [the first ontological statement, author’s note], often introduced as a statement by Marx, is that categories express *forms of being, determinations of existence*”.<sup>20</sup> With this Lukács wishes to emphasise Marx’s opposition to all forms of “gnoseological idealism” based on a concept of categories as mere “products of our mind regarding the establishment of being”.<sup>21</sup> The third fundamental ontological

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W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. I, *Die objektive Logik*, 1, *Die Lehre vom Sein*, 1812 (2nd edition 1832), in *HGW*, vol. 21, p. 68-69, trans. G. Di Giovanni, *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 59).

<sup>18</sup> The quote Lukács refers to for his ‘fundamental ontological statement’ of ‘objectivity’ is: “A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its object; i.e., it is not objectively related. Its being is not objective. A non-objective being is a non being” (K. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* (“*Erste Wiedergabe*”), in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. I, vol. 2, p. 296, trans. M. Milligan and D. J. Struik, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 337). For the passages where Lukács refers to this excerpt in Marx, considered as the presentation of the “first fundamental ontological statement”, see Lukács, *Prolegomena*, p. 115; Id., *Zur Ontologie I*, in *GLW*, vol. 13, p. 578-579, trans. cit., *The Ontology 2. Marx*, p. 26; Id., *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins II*, in *GLW*, vol. 14, p. 502.

<sup>19</sup> The quote Lukács refers to his second ‘fundamental ontological statement’ regarding the objective factor of categories is: “Just as generally in the case of any historical, social science, so also in examining the development of economic categories it is always necessary to remember that the subject, in this context modern bourgeois society, is given, both in reality and in the mind, and that therefore the categories express forms of being, determination of existence – and sometimes only individual aspects – of this particular society, of this subject, and that even from the scientific standpoint it therefore by no means begins at the moment when it is first discussed as such. This has to be remembered because it provides the decisive criteria for the arrangement [of the material]” (Marx, *Einleitung*, p. 41; trans. cit., *Introduction*, p. 43). For textual references by Lukács to this excerpt in Marx, considered as a presentation of what he envisages as his second ‘ontological statement’, see Lukács, *Prolegomena*, p. 237-238; *ibid.*, p. 310-311 and Id., *Zur Ontologie II*, p. 171.

<sup>20</sup> “Die damit engst verbundene weitere, von uns ebenfalls oft angeführte Feststellung von Marx ist, daß die Kategorien Daseinsformen, Existenzbestimmungen sind” (Id., *Prolegomena*, p. 127).

<sup>21</sup> “Produkte unseres Denkens über die Beschaffenheit des Seins” (*ibid.*)

statement is ‘historicity’, considered as the irreversible process to which all reality is subject.<sup>22</sup> This is how Lukács presents the third statement:

In our previous analysis, we have repeatedly underlined the third key moment, which we will discuss here. More precisely, and we reached this point only gradually, the world is to be conceived not in dualistic terms through opposition between “things” and “immaterial” energies, but as a complex, the inner interactions of which, like the dialectics of development, produce irreversible (and hence historical) processes.<sup>23</sup>

There are many problems regarding the main thesis of the late Lukács about the existence in Marx of three – implicit – ontological statements. First and foremost, Marx never talks about ‘general ontology’. The load-bearing structure of Marx’s strictly philosophical discourse is always to *rethink* metaphysics in light of the ‘Praxis’ concept. In addition, Lukács fully supports Marx’s objective. As a result, it is a genuine mistake to interpret Lukács’ late ontological “change of direction” in terms of a *regression* towards a form of pre-dialectic relationship between subject and object. The social-ontological perspective of the late Lukács is never an involution towards a concept of reality considered only as an *Object* in the sense criticised by Marx in his first *Thesis on Feuerbach*, but always as the end result of practical mediation.<sup>24</sup> Lukács’ main statement is to use the ontological framework to delimit a genuine space for free action according to the terms of the ‘teleological positing [*teleologische Setzung*]’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The quote referred to by Lukács for his third ‘fundamental ontological statement’ regarding historicity is: “We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men” (K. Marx, F. Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, 1845-1846 Posth., in *MEW*, vol. 3, p. 18, trans. C. Dutt, *The German Ideology*, in *MECW*, vol. 5, p. 28). For textual references by Lukács to this excerpt in Marx, considered as a presentation of what he envisages as his third ‘ontological assertion’, see Lukács, *Prolegomena*, p. 35; *ibid.*, p. 107; Id., *Zur Ontologie I*, p. 562, trans. cit., *The Ontology 2. Marx*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> “Das dritte wesentliche Moment, das hier behandelt werden muß, ist in unseren bisherigen Analysen ebenfalls vielfach hervorgehoben worden. Nämlich, daß wir allmählich dazu gekommen sind, die Welt nicht dualistisch in der Form von »Dingen« (sowie verdinglichter Gedankengebilde) und »immateriellen« Energien aufzufassen, sondern als Komplexe, deren innere Wechselbeziehungen sowie Bewegungsdiagnostik irreversible (also historische) Prozesse auslösten” (Id., *Prolegomena*, p. 127-128).

<sup>24</sup> “The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object* [*Objekt*], or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively” (K. Marx, *Thesen über Feuerbach*, 1845 Posth., in *MEW*, vol. 3, p. 533, trans. Unknown, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *MECW*, vol. 5, p. 3).

<sup>25</sup> “Through labour, a teleological positing is realized within material being, as the rise of a new objectivity. The first consequence of this is that labour becomes the model



One more important consideration has to be introduced into this discussion about these three 'fundamental ontological statements'. Lukács often tries to illustrate his idea of being – objective, irreversible and individual – by indirectly referring to Leibniz's concept of substance considered as 'monad'. He does not explicitly cite it, but in key passages of his late considerations, he refers to Leibniz's famous principle of the so-called 'Identity of Indiscernibles': "Like generality, individuality is precisely one of the fundamental categories of every being: There is no being who does not also exist as an example of its species (general) and as individual objectivity (individual). Leibniz has demonstrated this using his famous anecdote of the leaves and ladies-in-waiting".<sup>26</sup>

Lukács therefore states that the only basis compatible not only with the *Weltbild* elaborated from the three fundamental ontological statements, but also with the need to maintain the key role of *praxis* in the relationship with reality is a monadological concept of reality.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Leibniz's 'monad' and not an inexistent – or at least very difficult to

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for any social practice, for in such social practice – no matter how ramified its mediations – teleological positings are always realized, and ultimately realized materially" (G. Lukács, *Zur Ontologie II*, p. 12, trans. D. Fernbach, *The Ontology of Social Being 3. The Labour*, London, Merlin, 1980, p. 3).

<sup>26</sup> "Einzelheit ist nämlich, ebenso wie Allgemeinheit, eine der Grundkategorien eines jeden Seins: es gibt kein Seiendes, das nicht zugleich als Exemplar seiner Gattung (allgemein) und als einzelne Gegenständlichkeit (einzelnes) existieren würde. Leibniz hat dies nach einer berühmten Anekdote der Hofdamen an den Pflanzblättern demonstriert" (Id., *Prolegomena*, p. 44). On the same point, see also *ibid.*, p. 285; Id., *Zur Ontologie I*, p. 357-358; Id., *Zur Ontologie II*, p. 243 and Id., *Gelebtes Denken*, p. 197; trans. cit., *Record of a Life*, p. 142. The anecdote to which Lukács refers, but without ever providing any textual reference, is present in Leibniz's fourth letter to Samuel Clarke (26 May 1716): "There is no such things as two individuals indiscernible from each other. An ingenious gentleman of my acquaintance, discoursing with me in the presence of Her Electoral Highness, the Princess Sophia, in the garden of Herrenhausen, thought he could find two leaves perfectly alike. The princess defied him to do it, and he ran all over the garden a long time to look for some; but it was to no purpose. Two drops of water or milk, viewed with a microscope, will appear distinguishable from each other. This is an argument against atoms, which are confuted, as well as vacuum, by the principles of true metaphysics" (*Streitschriften zwischen Leibniz und Clarke 1715-1716*, in G.F. Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, Hildesheim, Olms, 1978, vol. VII, p. 372, trans. L. E. Loemker, *The Controversy between Leibniz and Clarke*, in Id., *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1989, p. 687).

<sup>27</sup> Leibniz's role in most of Lukács' late ontological works has been neglected by those who have interpreted his works. Rockmore is the only person to have commented briefly. See T. Rockmore, *Irrationalism. Lukács and the Marxist View of Reason*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1992, p. 229.

directly obtain – ‘ontology’ by Marx would in many ways problematically seem to be the true basis of the late Lukács’ ‘general ontology’.

### 3. Uneven development and the Marxist aesthetics

During his first long sojourn in Moscow (December 1929-Summer 1931) Lukács worked as a researcher at the ‘Marx-Engels Institute’. The Director David B. Rjazanov introduced him to Mikhail A. Lifshits, a twenty-five year old collaborator at the Institute.<sup>28</sup> The idea to reveal the fragmentary, but in their opinion extant ‘Marxist aesthetics’, emerged gradually during their conversations. The idea they shared during that period was that this aesthetics came from the possibility to identify its *independent theoretical fundamentals*, in other words without ‘integrating’ it with ideas taken from other philosophies.<sup>29</sup> Their joint intellectual efforts led to the publication of Lifshits’s book *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx* (1932) and, in the thirties, several papers by Lukács on issues relating to aesthetics. The first Russian edition of the Marx-Engels anthology, *On Art and Literature*, was edited by Mikhail A. Lifshits and published in 1933.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, Lukács immediately realised that an independent Marxist aesthetics cannot exist without a more general Marxist philosophy considered as *Weltanschauung*. While trying to establish an independent Marxist aesthetics Lukács reflected on the nature of Marx’s – not immediately existent – philosophy. Even then, Lukács was well aware that an anthology of citations on art and literature was not enough to build a

<sup>28</sup> For the historical context, see L. Sziklai, *After the Proletarian Revolution. Georg Lukács’s Marxist Development 1930-1945*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992, p. 66-67.

<sup>29</sup> G. Lukács, *Nachwort*, 1970, in *GLW*, vol. 4, p. 676. On the same point cf. also Id., *Gelebtes Denken*, p. 123-124, trans. cit., *Record of a Life*, p. 86-87 and also Lukács’ last letter to Lifshits (17 June 1970) in E. Pavlov, “Review of Mikhail Lifshits and György Lukács *Perepiska* [Letters]”, *Historical Materialism*, 20 (4), 2012, p. 195.

<sup>30</sup> See M. Lifshits, *Esteticheskie vzglyady Marksa*, 1932, trans. R. B. Winn, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, London, Pluto Press, 1973 and F. Lifshits, F. Schiller, *Marx i Engels o iskusstve i Literature*, Moscow, Sovetskaja Literatura, 1933. About M. Lifshits, see S. Mitchell, “Mikhail Alexandrovich Lifshits (1905-1983)”, *Oxford Art Journal*, 20 (2), 1997, p. 23-41 and A. Maidansky, V. Oittinen, “Mikhail Lifshits. An enigmatic Marxist”, *Studies in East European Thought*, 68 (4), 2016, p. 241-246. For a retrospective account on the relationship between Lukács and Lifshits, see M. Lifshits, L. Sziklai, *Moszkvai évek Lukács Györggyel. Beszélgetések, emlékezések*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1989, trans. B. Mai, *Interview mit Michail Lifšic*. (22. November 1974; 2. Gespräch), in A. Hiersche, E. Kowalski (eds.), *Literaturkritik in der frühsowjetischen Diskussion. Dokumente*, Bern, Peter Lang, 1993, p. 403-421.

Marxist aesthetics. In the preface to *The Specificity of Aesthetics*, Lukács clearly illustrates the whole picture:

When I wrote my first contribution to the Aesthetics of Marxism about thirty years ago, I advocated the thesis that Marxism had its own aesthetics, and my view met with considerable resistance. The reason was that, prior to Lenin, Marxism, even in its best theoretical representatives such as Plechanov or Mehring, limited itself almost entirely to the problems of historical materialism. Only since Lenin has dialectical materialism returned to the centre of interest. This is why Mehring, who incidentally based his aesthetics on Kant's "Critique of Judgement", could see in the divergences between Marx – Engels and Lassalle no more than the clash of subjective judgements of taste. This controversy has, of course, long been solved. Since the brilliant study by M. Lifshits on the evolution of the aesthetics views of Marx, since his careful collection and systematization of the scattered utterances of Marx, Engels and Lenin on aesthetic questions, there can be no more doubt about the connection and cohesion of their train of thought. However, the demonstration and proof of such a systematic connection is still far from solving with finality the demand for an aesthetics of Marxism. If aesthetics or at least its perfect skeleton were explicitly included in the collected and systematically arranged utterances of the classics of Marxism, then nothing but a good running commentary would be needed in order to present us with a complete Marxist aesthetics. But there can be no question of this! Ample experience shows that not even a direct monographic application of this material to each particular question can provide what is scientifically essential for the construction of the whole. One has to face the paradoxical situation that a Marxist aesthetics does exist and does not exist at one and the same time, that it still has to be conquered, even created through independent research, and that the result still only presents and fixes something already existing conceptually.<sup>31</sup>

Thirty years were to pass before Lukács explicitly admitted that an – immediate – Marxist aesthetics did not exist. Nevertheless, Lukács' essays in the thirties focusing on Franz Mehring, Theodor R. Vischer and Friedrich Schiller are all based on the methodological requisite to test the fundamental principles of that aesthetics.<sup>32</sup> For Lukács, its key element resided in acknowledging the *cognitive value of art*<sup>33</sup> (this is more than

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<sup>31</sup> G. Lukács, *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, in *GLW*, vol. 11, p. 16-17, trans. Unknown, "Introduction to a Monograph on Aesthetics", *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, 14, 1964, p. 60-61.

<sup>32</sup> See Id., *Franz Mehring (1846-1919)*; Id., *Zur Ästhetik Schillers*, 1935, in *GLW*, vol. 10; Id., *Karl Marx und Friedrich Theodor Vischer*, 1934, in *GLW*, vol. 10. The most important contribution by Lukács during that period involved establishing the fundamentals of an independent Marxist aesthetics from a purely theoretical point of view, in Id., *Kunst und objektive Wahrheit*.

<sup>33</sup> "The theory of reflection provides the common basis for *all* forms of theoretical and practical mastery of reality through consciousness. Thus it is also the basis for the theory of the artistic reflection of reality. In this discussion, we will seek to elaborate the

evident even as far back as his essays in the thirties). This thesis is part of the basic idea behind Lukács' considerations in the fifties and sixties according to which art, science and everyday life are three different 'types of reflections' of the same reality, each one operating through its own specificity.<sup>34</sup> This is the meaning of the term 'specificity', which is therefore also the 'specificity' of forms of knowledge that appears in the title of his book *On the Specificity of Aesthetics* published in 1963.<sup>35</sup>

The main theoretical rival of Marxist aesthetics that Lukács decides to create from 1930 onwards is the concept of art as a phenomenon that can be entirely explained by a certain economic order. Lukács writes at length about the concept of the 'specificity of aesthetics' in the work published with that title in 1963. Using this concept he tries to complete his task, distancing himself from any form of basis-superstructure interpretative model. In other words, he uses 'specificity' to understand the aesthetic phenomenon as endowed with its own immanent legality, one which determines its genesis and forms of manifestation in terms not *immediately* referable to the social and economic context in which it occurs.

Establishing the specific legality of the aesthetic phenomenon is the methodological key that allows Lukács to also *analogically* question the 'specificity' of other social fields. In essence, the 'specificity' of the aesthetic phenomenon acts as a methodological trailblazer, i.e., it indicates a functioning dynamics also vis-à-vis other forms of 'specificity' (of everyday life, politics, the law and science) in their relationship with the social whole. Unlike the aesthetic phenomenon, Lukács did not write extensively about other forms of 'specificity': nevertheless, he considered the *Ontology of Social Being* as a basic framework for future studies.

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*specific* aspects of artistic reflection within the scope of the general theory" (Id., *Kunst und objektive Wahrheit*, p. 607, trans. cit., *Art and Objective Truth*, p. 25).

<sup>34</sup> "The significance of the break thus brought about with every kind of philosophical idealism becomes even more obvious in its consequences if we further concretize our materialistic point of departure, viz., if we comprehend art a peculiar manifestation of the reflection of reality, a manifestation which itself is but one among various forms of the universal relationship of man to reality, of man's reflection of reality. One of the most decisive basic ideas of this work is that all types of reflection – we analyse primarily those of everyday life, science and of art – always picture the same objective reality" (Id., *Die Eigenart I*, p. 22, trans. cit., *Introduction*, p. 65).

<sup>35</sup> Id., *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, in *GLW*, vols. 11-12.

#### 4. Uneven development and ideology

‘Uneven development’ and the ‘ideological’ use of the historical past are two obstacles Lukács cannot avoid when he tries to establish the basis of Marxist aesthetics. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and its initial world-famous words is the text in which these two elements clearly co-exist.<sup>36</sup> Marx states:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795. In like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new.<sup>37</sup>

Marx formulates several general theories vis-à-vis the socio-political use of the past, in other words he tackles the problems traditionally part of the field of *ideology*. Taking Marx as a basis, Lukács maintains that the use of the past always corresponds to socio-political needs prompted by the present (but to find an explicit explanation of this statement we have to wait until *The Ontology of Social Being*). This is the reason why all efforts to recover the past in its original form is, from the very start, doomed to failure: “human actions have results different from those envisaged in their

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<sup>36</sup> “It is part of the ontological nature of social being that all the directions, tendencies, etc. that appear in it are made up of individual acts of an alternative nature. In the arts, where the overwhelming majority of objectifications that have to be considered are directly the product of individual acts, this general structure must attain a particular importance, i.e. the law of uneven development here affects the individual acts themselves in a still more profound and decisive fashion” (Id., *Zur Ontologie I*, p. 662, trans. cit., *The Ontology 2. Marx*, p. 132-133). Cf. also Id., *Prolegomena*, p. 231-232 and Id., *Zur Ontologie II*, p. 421-422.

<sup>37</sup> K. Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. I, vol. 11, p. 96, trans. C. Dutt, R. Livingstone, C. Upward, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *MECW*, vol. 11, p. 103-104.

subjective goals, and that therefore – speaking very roughly and generally – men usually make history with a false consciousness”.<sup>38</sup>

Lukács’ considerations about recovering the past are part of a more general attempt to determine the nature of the ideology. He states that ideology has nothing to do with the dimension of ‘false consciousness’, or the need to close an alleged gap between reality and its subjective cognisance. In fact, he states: “Ideology not (in agnoseological form) as ‘false consciousness’, but (in continuity with Marx’s doctrine) as a means to acquire consciousness and combat the social conflicts that take place within the framework of economic development”.<sup>39</sup> Based on this unique interpretation of Marx’s ideology, Lukács comes to the following conclusion: “This comprehensive definition by Marx – and this is the most important aspect of its broad usability – does not provide a univocal answer to the question of the methodological and objective accuracy or inaccuracy of ideologies. They are both possible”.<sup>40</sup> Marx believes that ideology is the means with which men achieve and at the same time mystify real social conflicts. This is why Marx can legitimately qualify the references made to classical Rome by the revolutionaries in 1789 as parodistic:

But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battle of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman Republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the

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<sup>38</sup> G. Lukács, *Zur Ontologie I*, p. 662, trans. cit., *The Ontology 2. Marx*, p. 133.

<sup>39</sup> “Ideologie nicht (erkenntnistheoretisch) als »falsches Bewußtsein«, sondern (nach der Lehre von Marx) als Mittel zum Bewußtmachen und Ausfechten der von der ökonomischen Entwicklung aufgeworfenen Konflikte verstanden wird” (Id., *Prolegomena*, p. 291). See also *ibid.*, p. 71n. The quote from Marx to which Lukács refers is: “The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” (K. Marx, *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, 1859, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. II, vol. 2, p. 101, trans. S. Ryazanskaya, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *MECW*, vol. 29, p. 263).

<sup>40</sup> “Diese umfassende Bestimmung von Marx — und das ist das wichtigste Moment ihrer weitreichenden Verwendbarkeit — gibt auf die Frage der methodologischen und sachlichen Richtigkeit oder Falschheit der Ideologien gar keine eindeutige Antwort. Beides ist praktisch gleich möglich” (Lukács, *Prolegomena*, p. 10).

bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to maintain their passion on the high plane of great historical tragedy.<sup>41</sup>

Identity and difference is the form of relationship linking the ‘specificity’ of a determinate artistic genre to a determinate society; this is methodologically true even for everyday life, politics, law and science. These categories should be understood as ‘determinations of reflection’ (as defined by Hegel), i.e., one without the other is senseless, “determinations reflected into themselves”.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, ‘uneven development’ expresses the *identity* between determinate artistic, everyday, political, juridical and scientific phenomena and the society that creates them. On the other hand, the concept of ‘uneven development’ underscores a *difference* between these countless practical phenomena and the society in which they exist. By using ‘specificity’ to imagine the genesis and evolutionary methods of multiple practical phenomena they can be understood as an ensemble *not linked* to economics, albeit without *abstracting* them altogether from the latter.

##### *5. Misconception. A necessary consequence of uneven development*

On 11 June 1861 Marx wrote to Ferdinand Lassalle to thank him for sending his recently published book, *System of Vested Rights*. Marx took the opportunity to send a few critical comments to Lassalle about the genesis of the ‘complete testamentary freedom’ he believes was established by the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688.<sup>43</sup> Marx’s observations triggered a fully-fledged *querelle* between the two authors. On the first of July 1861 Lassalle replied stating that the English testamentary right is based on a ‘misconception’ of the Roman testamentary right: “So the English have

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<sup>41</sup> Marx, *Der achtzehnte*, p. 97-98, trans. cit., *The Eighteenth*, p. 104-105.

<sup>42</sup> Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. I, *Die objektive Logik*, 2, *Die Lehre vom Wesen*, 1813, in *HGW*, vol. 11, p. 258, trans. cit., *The Science of Logic*, p. 354. About this point, see V. Verra, *Le determinazioni della riflessione nella Scienza della logica di Hegel*, in Id., *Su Hegel*, a c. di C. Cesa, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007, p. 120-121.

<sup>43</sup> “English law has taken a course diametrically opposed to that of French law. Complete testamentary freedom (whereby non Englishman or Yankee is compelled to leave his family a farthing) dates back to the bourgeois revolution of 1688 and evolved in the same measure as ‘bourgeois’ property developed in England. Thus, it would seem after all that, aside from its specifically Roman origins, etc., complete testamentary freedom, indeed the making of wills generally, is a *delusion* which, in bourgeois society too, must have roots of its own, independent of mythology, etc.” (Marx to Lassalle, 11 June, 1861, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. III, vol. 11, p. 494, trans. P. and B. Ross, *Letters*, in *MECW*, vol. 41, p. 294).

also based their will on Roman law and, by misinterpreting it, have imitated it – you cannot deny this”.<sup>44</sup> On 22 July 1861 Marx again wrote to Lassalle rejecting *in toto* Lassalle’s theory of this ‘misunderstanding’. Although explicitly pressed by his interlocutor, Marx never raised the issue ever again.<sup>45</sup> It’s worth citing Marx’s position verbatim:

You have shown that the adoption of the Roman will originally rested on a misconception [*Mißverständniß*] (and still does, so far as the sagacity of learned jurists is concerned). But it by no means follows from this that the will in its modern form – no matter with what misconceptions of Roman law modern jurists may construe it – is the *misconceived* Roman will. If this were so, it might be said that every attainment of an earlier age adopted by a later one is a *misunderstanding of the past*. It is certain, for instance, that the 3 unities, as theoretically construed by the French dramatists in Louis XIV’s day, rest on a misconception of Greek drama (and of Aristotle as the exponent thereof). On the other hand, it is equally certain that they understood the Greeks in a way that corresponded exactly to their own artistic needs. Hence their continued adherence to this so-called ‘classical’ drama long after Dacier and others had provided them with a correct interpretation of Aristotle. It is also certain that all modern constitutions are largely based on a *misconception* of the English constitution, adopting as essential precisely that which appears to be declining in the English constitution – and which continues to exist in England *in name* only *per abusum* – e.g. a so-called responsible *cabinet*. The misunderstood form is precisely the general one. It is the one that lends itself to general use at a certain stage in the development of society.<sup>46</sup>

On 9 December 1861 Marx wrote to Engels about Lassalle’s theory: “Ideologism permeates everything, and the dialectical method is *wrongly*

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<sup>44</sup> “Daß auch die Engländer ihr Testament immer aus dem *Römischen Recht* aufgenommen u. ihm, mißverstehend, nachgebildet – das wirst Du auch nicht leugnen können” (Lassalle to Marx, 1 July, 1861, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. III, vol. 11, p. 519).

<sup>45</sup> Lassalle wrote a long letter (28 July 1861) in reply to Marx’s letter dated 22 July 1861, see *ibid.*, p. 548-553. On 25 August Lassalle again writes to Marx complaining that he has not replied, see *ibid.*, p. 563, and yet again a few months later (22 November 1861), see *ibid.* p. 602-603. Marx waited until 28 April 1862 before referring to this issue again, see *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. III, vol. 12, p. 77-79, trans. cit., *Letters*, in *MECW*, vol. 41, p. 356-357. In his letter Marx caustically suggests that Lassalle read Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (regrettably, he adds, in the French version since Lassalle does not speak Italian!) and cites several excerpts about testamentary law written by Vico.

<sup>46</sup> Marx to Lassalle, 22 July 1861, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. III, vol. 11, p. 544, trans. cit., *Letters*, in *MECW*, vol. 41, p. 317-318. Already in 1925, Lukács quotes the passage, see *Id.*, *Die neue Ausgabe von Lassalles Briefen (Rezension)*, 1925, in *GLW*, vol. 2, p. 636, trans. M. McColgan, *The New Edition of Lassalle’s Letters*, in *Id.*, *Tactics and Ethics 1919-1929*, London, Verso, 2014, p. 173-174. About this letter, see G.M. Cazzaniga, *Marx e l’idea di progresso*, in G.M. Cazzaniga, D. Losurdo, L. Sichirolo (eds.), *Marx e i suoi critici*, Urbino, QuattroVenti, 1987, p. 62, n. 15.



applied. Hegel never described as dialectics the subsumption of vast numbers of ‘cases’ under a general principle”.<sup>47</sup> Marx clearly sets out what he considers is the main problem inherent in the *System of Vested Rights*: the misunderstanding about the genuine nature of the ‘dialectics’ is the reason prompting Lassalle to consider a ‘misconception’ the relationship between post-1688 English testamentary right and the original Roman testamentary right.

Lukács often cites this *querelle* between Marx and Lassalle, emphasising how Marx’s theory, according to which “the misunderstood form is precisely the general one”, is in actual fact an element that conceptually follows on from the theory of uneven development:

Marx goes on directly to deal with uneven development. He shows in particular that in the continuity of historical development the attempts to grasp a legal phenomenon in thought and to transform it into practice are time and again conducted in the form of regression to institutions from earlier eras and their interpretation, and in fact must be conducted.<sup>48</sup>

As a result, the law of historical evolution of the juridical phenomenon vis-à-vis the overall changes in society must be reconstructed only *post festum* and does not follow any logic formulated a priori.<sup>49</sup> Lassalle assumes that once the essence of the concept (of testamentary law) has been understood, it is possible to find it throughout history:

And precisely for this reason it has been our goal for now on to tackle the essence of testamentary law, in the first place Roman law, precisely to draw back the sensitive veils that conceal it; these veils have up to now hindered knowledge [of the essence], and reveal its pure soul through material reality.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Marx to Engels, 9 December 1861, in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup>, sect. III, vol. 11, p. 616, trans. cit., *Letters*, in *MECW*, vol. 41, p. 333.

<sup>48</sup> Lukács, *Zur Ontologie I*, p. 656, trans. cit., *Ontology 2. Marx*, p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> Lukács explicitly interprets this exchange between Marx and Lassalle as the theoretical explanation of Marx’s theory of ‘uneven development’, see *ibid.*, p. 655-660, trans. cit., *The Ontology 2. Marx*, p. 123-129.

<sup>50</sup> “Ebendeshalb mußte es unsere Aufgabe sein, nachfolgend das Wesen des Erbrechtes – und zwar zunächst des römischen – zu schreiben, d.h. diesem gesamten Institute überall den verhüllenden sinnlicher Schleier abzureißen, welcher dasselbe bisher der Erkenntnis entrückt hat, und seine reine Seele überall durch das Stoffliche hindurch zur durchsichtigen Erscheinung zu bringen” (F. Lassalle, *Das System von erworbenen Rechte II, I*, 1860, In *Id.*, *Gesammelte Reden und Schriften*, ed. E. Bernstein, Berlin, Paul Cassirer, 1920, vol. 11, p. 13).

Lassalle's method involves starting from an abstract, non-historical universality and only later trying to find it in history. As a result, history is merely the place where the concept, formulated elsewhere, is exhibited. However, by using this method Lassalle precludes it from acquiring a *concrete* and not merely formal universality. This is precisely what Marx criticises. This kind of philosophical-methodological basis inevitably leads Lassalle to consider history as a space in which misunderstood uses of a conceptual universality (created at the start and not acquired gradually and concretely) follow on from one another, i.e., that develop and evolve over the ages.

Lassalle works with testamentary law as if it were a concept already created *ab origine*; accordingly, as a definition it acts as a *premise*. However, in principle Lassalle precludes any possible form of concrete universality. In this case the meaning of the adjective concrete is the one attributed to it by Marx in his *Introduction* in 1857: "The concrete is concrete because it is a synthesis of many determinations, thus a unity of the diverse".<sup>51</sup>

Two possible interpretative models of historical materialism – *identity* and *difference* – derive from the problem of the historical misinterpretation tackled by Marx and Lassalle in their correspondence. *Identity* is a vulgarised version of historical materialism that considers society as a historically evolving system in which the 'specificity' of the various social fields is understood simply by linking these fields to the economics they embody. The latter, *difference*, is followed by those who reject historical materialism *sic et simpliciter* and instead eulogise a 'difference' based on the need to consider those social fields as a completion not linked to production. Lukács realises that both these interpretations lead to a dead end. This is why he focuses so intensely on the category of 'particularity'.<sup>52</sup> According to Lukács, particularity is the decisive category mediating between universality and individuality. Hence 'particularity' and 'specificity' represent the fields which in the future will have to be examined in order to free Marxist *Weltbild* from schematic and reductionist errors.

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<sup>51</sup> Marx, *Einleitung*, p. 36, trans. cit., *Introduction*, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> G. Lukács, *Über die Besonderheit als Kategorie der Ästhetik*, 1956, in *GLW*, vol. 10, p. 597-638.

### *Conclusions*

Lukács considers uneven development as the context in which the category of ‘specificity’ is historically and socially manifest. In fact, the former is the typical form of reciprocal relations between the chief social fields during historical evolution (art, science, law and everyday life). Recalling the terminology of the letter to Werner Hofmann cited at the beginning of this essay, we can say that ‘uneven development’ is the reason why social ‘laws’ are imposed and yet are also constantly disproved by facts, and thus exposed as ‘trends’. Lukács does not consider that the constitutive shift of ‘laws’ into ‘trends’ involves eliminating *sic et simpliciter* the attempt to identify determinate constants of development and legality in the relationship between economic progress and corresponding changes in major social fields. Instead he is obsessed with establishing determinate legality without, however, losing sight of the irreversible process of the historical and social substratum in which these fields are produced and evolve.

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